

say our day is upon us and we may return to the free shores of Vieques and take with us the sand to fulfill the dream you shared with me. But Markiani, you cannot yet play safely on all of the beaches until the cleanup is completed. Your ultimate dream is that the lands be returned finally to the people of Vieques. One day all of Vieques will be reclaimed, safe for the people to fully enjoy without fears of bombing or the residue of Naval training. As one era ends and another begins, we celebrate the long-awaited peace for Vieques.

The aforementioned letter is as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, DC, April 30, 2003.

Hon. CRAIG MANSON,
Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. MANSON: Public Law 106-398, as amended by Public Law 107-107, directs that upon termination of Navy and Marine Corps operations on the Island of Vieques, the Secretary of the Navy shall transfer to the Secretary of the Interior, without reimbursement, approximately 14,572.791 acres located on the eastern end of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. A description of the property is attached. Note that this transfer excludes the approximately 96-acre parcel known as Parcel C, which was acquired on April 29, 2003 by the Department of the Interior.

As agreed to by Mr. Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, all Navy and Marine Corps operations on the Island of Vieques will terminate at noon, April 30, 2003, and the Department of the Navy hereby transfers its interests in and jurisdiction over the approximately 14,572.791 acres of East Vieques to the Department of the Interior at that time.

The Commander, Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command is responsible for implementing this transfer on behalf of the Department of the Navy. He may be reached at the following address and phone number: Rear Admiral Michael K. Loose, CEC, USN, Commander, Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, 1510 Gilbert Street, Norfolk, Virginia 23511-2699, 757-322-8000.

I request that you acknowledge the Department of the Interior's acceptance of jurisdiction, custody, and control for this property by signing and returning a copy of this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact my staff or me with any questions on this transfer.

Sincerely,

HANSFORD T. JOHNSON,
Secretary of the Navy Acting.

Attachment.

ATTACHMENT

Acknowledgement of the Acceptance of transfer for Jurisdiction over, Custody of, and Control for approximately 14,572.791 acres located on the eastern end of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. This transfer shall be effective at 11:59 A.M., EDT April 30, 2003.

CRAIG MANSON,
Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

RECOGNIZING NATIONAL AUCTIONEERS DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FEENEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota

(Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud lifetime Member of the National Auctioneers Association. We want to recognize today National Auctioneers Day, which takes place annually on the third Saturday of April. This year it fell on April 19. And I suppose some of my colleagues are wondering can he really do that? Yes, I do a lot of auctions even today: "And now 35, I'll give you 40, now 5. Anybody bid 45? I'll give you 50."

I have had the privilege of auctioneering events to raise money for the American Cancer Society, the Boys and Girls Club, Safari Club, Ducks Unlimited, the list goes on and on. As a matter of fact, since I was elected to Congress, I have raised almost \$2 million for charity. Every year billions of dollars are poured into our economy from auctions of estates, of vehicles, thoroughbred horses, antiques and other goods. And auctions of homes and other real estate are increasingly more important as more and more realtors and homeowners see the advantages of selling by auction as their first choice.

On Auctioneer's Day this year, auctioneers across the country held a special fund-raiser for the Saint Jude Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, the chosen charity of the National Auctioneers Association. Auctioneers are generous and patriotic Americans, and I rise to salute their contributions to our great country.

HONORING STATE SENATOR CLARENCE W. BLOUNT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Maryland Senator Clarence W. Blount, a man whose life exemplified the greatness that lives within all of us.

I am saddened to inform this body that in the afternoon of April 12, 2003, State Senator Clarence Blount passed away from complications related to a stroke at the age of 81. He is survived by his wife Gordine, and his two sons, Michael and Mark, and many more friends and family in Maryland who mourn the loss of this great statesman.

Mr. Speaker, W.E.B. DuBois once wrote that "the roots of the tree, rather than its leaves, are the source of its life." Today I honor a man who devoted his life to that principle.

When Clarence Blount died, he was best known as the former majority leader of the Maryland Senate where he served the people of Maryland for over 31 years, after stepping aside last year to let in some "new blood," and as a champion of public education. However, I recall this wonderful human being as my teacher, my mentor and friend. Clarence Blount, by his own self-description, was an ordinary man

called to an extraordinary mission of uplifting the lives of others. He remained steadfast in pursuit of that calling. In the process, he became extraordinary himself. When Clarence Blount was born to Lottie and Charles Johnson Blount, Sr., in South Creek, North Carolina on April 20, 1921, I doubt whether anyone outside of his own family could have anticipated just how far his determination and talent would carry him in life.

His father worked on a tobacco farm. His mother would die when he was just 5 years old. The Blount family was so poor they could not afford to buy their children shoes. It was only after the family moved to Baltimore that Clarence Blount was able to begin school at the age of 10. At that time he was unable to read or count on his fingers, but through determination and with the help of dedicated teachers, he graduated from Frederick Douglass High School at the age of 21.

He became one of the greatest champions of American public education ever known. One month after Clarence Blount entered Morgan State University, he was drafted into the then-segregated United States Army to fight in World War II. He served with distinction in Italy as a member of the all-black Buffalo Division of the 92nd Infantry.

The courage and dedication to duty that he demonstrated while removing mines from a river passage earned him a battlefield commission. After fighting for his country against both the enemy and the barriers of Jim Crow, Mr. Blount returned to Morgan State in 1946 and graduated in 1950. He became a teacher, earned a master's degree in education from Johns Hopkins University, and eventually advanced to become the principal of Baltimore's Dunbar High School.

Mr. Speaker, the education of children became Clarence Blount's passion and mission in life. He used his own prior hardships and life experiences as a passport to help other people improve their lives. As a teacher, principal, and later chairman of the Social Services Department of the Community College of Baltimore, Clarence Blount opened the doors to educational opportunities for thousands of young people in our community.

That same calling and that same determination, to address the inadequate funding of our public schools, led Mr. Blount into public life. He sought and won election to the Maryland Senate in 1971. He became the first African American to chair a Senate committee in 1987, and he became Maryland's first African American majority leader in 1983, a post that he held until his retirement last year.

It was during that period of public service that Clarence Blount directly influenced the course of my life. When I was a young legislator serving my second year in the Maryland House of Delegates, Senator Blount, then chair of the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus, encouraged me to run for and win

that position. He had seen something in me that I had not seen in myself. Our personal relationship became even closer when we traveled together to Israel in the 1980s. He became like a second father to me.

He later encouraged me to run for the second highest position in the State of Maryland House of Delegates, Speaker pro tempore. He was the first person to encourage me to run for Congress in 1996. I recount these personal influences because Clarence Blount's impact upon my life was not unique. He touched everybody he could. He never ceased being a teacher who found his greatest reward in the accomplishments of his students.

About a year and a half ago, Clarence Blount and I were both asked to speak at a neighborhood housing event in the Ashburton section of Baltimore. I thanked him for being such a magnificent and significant part of my life, for seeing qualities in me that I had not realized in myself. I also thanked him for fighting for our neighborhoods in Baltimore and for giving our communities a voice in Annapolis.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand today to salute a great American who came up through difficult times, an ordinary man called to an extraordinary mission.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIAHRT. addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXPANSION OF MANDATE OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE-VETERANS AFFAIRS JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill that would greatly expand the mandate of the Department of Defense-Veterans Affairs Joint Executive Committee. This committee would be tasked to oversee the realm of collaborative efforts of not just health, but also benefits and other areas to promote increased resource sharing between the two departments.

While statutory authority to allow resource sharing has existed for more than 20 years, the latest figures tell us that the level of sharing between the VA and DOD remains relatively low. The Federal Government can and must do more to increase resource sharing whenever and wherever feasible.

This bill would allow the Joint Executive Committee to identify changes in policies, to improve services, efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration in order to deliver benefits and services to beneficiaries of both departments. Inefficiencies and duplication

not only waste taxpayer dollars, they shortchange military personnel, retirees and veterans seeking the services offered by VA and DOD.

I believe the expansion of this Joint Executive Committee would facilitate necessary discussions and decisions that will ultimately lead to greater efficiencies within and between the two departments. I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) of the Veterans Affairs Committee for his cooperation in developing this very important piece of legislation. It is time that these departments seize the opportunity and take full advantage of the benefits that come from sharing their extensive resources.

EXTENDING THE TEMPORARY EMERGENCY UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the many hard-working families in our country that cannot make ends meet as this economy slows and the job market continues to weaken.

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These families are the main reason we must absolutely extend the temporary emergency unemployment compensation program, TEUC; and they are the reason we must do it now. With the current high unemployment rate of 5.8 percent, unemployment benefits are the same as when the TEUC program was first established in March of 2002, over a year ago, and reextended in January, 2003. Just last week the Department of Labor reported that new applications for unemployment insurance hit the high number of 455,000 applicants for the week ending April 19. This is the highest level in more than a year. And it does not count families who have exhausted their benefits and still are not working.

Mr. Speaker, in March of this year, millions of workers had exhausted their regular unemployment benefits which continues the pattern of the past 24 months, where the numbers of unemployed workers receiving aid is absolutely and actually increasing. Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is a real need for unemployed worker relief in this Nation, but we do not need numbers and we do not need statistics to alert us to this growing problem. Just listen to the words from letters I have received from my constituents in the Sixth Congressional District of California. And when the Members hear their words, they will know that there is immediacy for additional unemployment insurance benefits, and they will know that it is important that people in districts like mine, Marin and Sonoma Counties, where the unemployment is not as dire

as some other areas in the country, still have needs as well as the rest of the Nation.

One constituent writes: "I have a master's degree and have not been able to find work. I also deal with a chronic illness. I find myself applying for food stamps and soon will be unable to pay any bills. I'm not sure I will have a roof over my head before long. A lot of people are having a very difficult time. Please try to make unemployment benefits a top priority."

Another writes: "I have been actively seeking work since the end of March, 2002, without success. I am a 55-year-old man who has never had a problem staying fully employed until this year. I have never before been affected by the reluctance of employers to hire older people. That, coupled with the stagnant economy, has made my ability to earn a living terrifyingly difficult. Unemployment compensation has kept food on my table for my family, but I worry what will happen next month."

These letters show how desperately workers need help. They need help just to keep their heads above water so their families can have the food and shelter they need to be healthy and safe, so their families can eat while their parents continue to search for work.

It is important that this Congress take action to make sure no family goes without basic needs like food or money for bills. That is why I support the gentleman from New York's (Congressman RANGEL) bill, H.R. 1652, the Unemployment Benefits Extension Act. This would provide 26 weeks of extended benefits through November, 2003. The consideration of this bill is critical as many unemployed workers once again find themselves reaching the end of unemployment benefits. If these benefits are not extended, in most States workers exhausting their regular benefits after May 31 of this year will receive no further assistance.

Extending these benefits would also give the economy a boost, Mr. Speaker, because unemployed workers would have money for purchases. Otherwise, without these benefits, these workers, unemployed workers, will have to curtail their spending, which would weaken the economy and continue the domino effect, causing even more job loss.

Economy.com analysis found that extension of the Federal unemployment insurance benefits would be the single most effective action that Congress could take now to boost the economy and protect jobs.

TERRORISM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FEENEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take this opportunity to comment on some recent developments in the Middle East.